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ABSTRACT

A study of the attitudes, sensitivity, and institutional response to the educational needs of adults at the University of Wyoming 100 years ago indicates a high degree of concern for and understanding of adult learner needs. Evidence is seen in: (1) specific provisions that were made for adults; (2) sensitivity of faculty and administration to adult needs; (3) instructors' understanding of andragogical principles; and (4) efforts made by faculty and administration to overcome informational, situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. This was clearly illustrated in policies regarding exemption from general requirements, recognition of experience, special interest classes, correspondence studies, and off-campus and summer educational opportunities, as found in university archives, personal letters, and policy statements. The study is provocative in the sense that few people realize the degree of institutional responsiveness that existed 100 years ago. The study raised the question of why more progress has not been made. (55 references) (KC)

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UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ADULTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE PAST

by

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UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ADULTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE PAST

Abstract:

A study of the attitudes, sensitivity and institutional response to the educational needs of adults at a western university, 100 years ago, indicates a high degree of concern and understanding of adult learner needs. This study is provocative in the sense that few people realize the degree of institutional responsiveness that existed at the turn of the century. Results provide evidence to question the rate of progress that has been made since then.

RATIONALE

Several scholars have expressed concern at the general lack of historical studies in the field of adult education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Long, 1976; Selman, 1976). When Rockhill (1976) argued for the development of good monographic studies that could serve as a basis for the conceptual synthesis of the field, she reiterated what well-known adult educator, Malcolm Knowles, had said in 1962. In depth studies of subdivisions of adult learning in specific geographic areas, such as a state, during a given period of time is necessary in order to gain an accurate perspective of the roots of the adult education movement in the United States.

How to meet the needs of non-traditional students is a crucial question on the campuses of many institutions of higher education today. It is generally recognized that adult learners have different needs than traditional students. Universities and colleges are introducing a variety of programs to accommodate adult learners (Holtsclaw, 1988; Greenland, 1988; McGuinness, 1987; McClain, 1986). Various avenues are being explored (Dicky, 1989; Watkins, 1989; Knox, 1987; Backus, 1984). In the light of the fact that adult learners have been a major group on our campuses since the late 1800's (Nel, 1986), critics may, however, question the progress that has been made over the past 100 years. Finding out what was done for adult students during pioneer years on our campuses appears to be an important topic for research

not only to learn about past values and traditions but it could be helpful in the shaping of views or in the prediction of future trends. By uncovering "new" facts about old existing practices, and by challenging existing assumptions, new understanding migh indeed be brought to our campuses.

PURPOSE

While the overall purpose of this investigation was to determine university responsiveness to adult student needs at the turn of the century, research efforts focused on the responsiveness of a particular mid-western institution, the University of Wyoming, during the first twenty five years of its existence. Recognition of adult students as a specific group, sensitivity to adult learner needs, efforts to overcome informational, situational, institutional and dispositional barriers, and understanding of andragogical principles were primary considerations.

METHOD

An extensive analysis of published and unpublished documents was done to gather information for this research project. Major emphasis was placed on primary resources located in the University of Wyoming Archives, American Heritage Center; the Wyoming State Archives in Cheyenne, Wyoming; the Coe Reference and Document Departments on the campus of the University of Wyoming; the Coe Library; and the Wyoming University Registrar's Office. The annual reports of department heads, directors of the Wyoming Experiment Station, presidents of the University of Wyoming, presidents of the Boards of Trustees, and governors of Wyoming were systematically reviewed. Valuable information was also extracted from other documentary sources such as faculty minutes, registrar's records, the corrrespondence of the president's office, scrapbooks of faculty members, library records, circulars, pamphlets and newspaper clippings. University of Wyoming Catalogues, Bulletins and Melanges, the WYO, the Wyoming School Journal, the Ranchman's Reminder and the

Wyoming Farm Bulletin were also reviewed, as well as random selected issues of the main newspapers of that time.

Limitations

As the case is in most historical studies, researchers are limited to sources available. The most severe limitation for this particular study was the fact that some evidence and data was hidden in boxes of unclassified and unsorted documents kept in the University of Wyoming Archives' store rooms. Going through these proved to be a time consuming task. Chances are, in a situation like this, that some sources could have been missed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The first white settlers came to Wyoming in 1853 (Baker, 1908). One of the most potent factors in bringing settlers to Wyoming was the building of the Union Pacific Railroad (Bartlett, 1918). Towns started to develop in 1867, and in 1869 a territorial government was established (Cheyenne Daily Leader, April 17, 1869). Between 1880 and statehood in 1890 the population increased from 20,789 to 62,555 (U. S. Census, 1895).

In 1886 the University of Wyoming was established. It formally opened its door on September 6, 1887 and enrolled 16 collegiate level students during the first year. Eleven of these were adults, "wives of townspeople mostly," according to Grace Hebard, well-known historican and member of the 1891 Board of Trustees.

Preliminary research indicated a great need for education and cultural enrichment for adults during early territorial times (Brady, 1900; Nei, 1989). With no radio or television, few libraries in existence (Nei, 1988; Nei, 1987), and large distances to travel on roads which were little more than trails during the summer and usually covered by snow in the winter, early settlers faced formidable barriers to participation in educational activities.

The pioneers brought with them a background of refinement, religion and social habits that had to be merged into a new environment with fewer cultural facilities (Beard, 1933). Evidence indicates that adults had a lively interest in education (Cheyenne Daily Leader,

1967; Swanson, 1908; Cook, 1909). Social clubs, fraternal organizations, women's clubs and church groups were established as soon as towns came into being. Although they were not primarily concerned with learning they made significant contributions to the education of adults, especially during the period prior to the establishment of the University of Wyoming.

Research shows that the University of Wyoming was committed to the education of non-traditional students right from the start. Adult education did not develop as an afterthought. It appears that both administration and faculty were determined to prevent the creation of all possible barriers that could prohibit older students from participating in educational activities. Their efforts included informational, situational, institutional, and psychosocial or dispositional barriers--the four major obstacles identified by scholars during recent times (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Larson, 1980; Cross, 1979; Morstain & Smart, 1974; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; McDaniel & Gray, 1987; Flannery & Apps, 1987; Sullins & Vogler, 1986; and others).

Efforts to Avoid Barriers to Participation

Potential informational barriers were avoided by the communication of information on learning opportunities to adults, even before the university had officially opened its doors. The first Circular of General Information, mailed to the public a few weeks before the university opened, provided in addition to information on standardized curricula for undergraduate studies, also a list of *Special Courses* designed for *Special Students*, and special provisions regarding admission requirements. All adults who wished to pursue a "specific line of study", or were "not qualified to study more broadly" (p. 4) were eligible to take *Special Courses*, and "students of an *advanced age* were permitted to pursue distinct lines of study" in any department. *Special Students* were identified as individuals who had "attained their majority". "Young and immature students" were not permitted to use the *Special Student* classification (Catalogue, 1911, p. 48).

Psychosocial barriers, in the form of organized educational activities being viewed by some adults as an inappropriate activity for mature individuals, were negated by the

prominence that was given to *Special Students* in the Circular. While the phrases "specific line of study" and according to "needs and choices", appealed to adult students' need to be slef-directed, the phrase "not qualified to study more broadly" normalized incomplete high school credentials and helped to combat fear and negative evaluations that adults may have had of themselves as potential learners.

A major institutional barrier was avoided by offering adults an alternative to the required standardized curriculum and step-by step progression towards a degree. It was clear that university officials intended to accommodate for adult students whose life circumstances were different from those of younger age students. Evidence indicates that adult learners, in many instances, were not subject to the same requirements for admission as were regular students. In the Division of Music, for instance, the Catalogue (1916) states the following:

> Students entering the Division of Music do so either as regular or *Special Students*. For regular students, the requirements for admission to the Division are the same as those of the Division of Letters and Sciences. *Special Students* are not subject to these requirements, but may enter at any time and with no previous preparation and may pursue such work as they may elect (Catalogue, 1916, p. 258).

Care appears to have been taken to assist adult students in making realistic choices regarding the courses they were interested in taking, and through the Catalogue they were informed when *Special Couses* required previous knowledge to handle successfully (1893). Although "mature" students were sometimes encouraged to take regular courses, the final decision always rested with "necessity or what the best interest of the student seemed to demand" (Faculty Minutes, Sept. 25, 1896). Credit was given for all *Special Courses* completed and provisions were made for "suitable certification" (Board of Trustees, 1889, p. 10).

The continual efforts of the university to adapt to the needs of adult students and to remove potential institutional barriers can be seen in their willingness to change institutional policies and practices that could impose inconvenience and frustration on adult

learners. An example of this took place in 1896 (September) when the faculty decided unanimously to excuse *Special Students* from rhetoricals and military drill. Two months later they also moved that "ladies of age entering as *Special Students* would not be required to give their age when matriculating" (Faculty Minutes). The circumstances leading up to this change in policy are not clear but the minutes do indicate that thirteen married women had been admitted to the *Special* English class six days prior to the faculty meeting! Although this decision seems trivial and somewhat amusing, it showed great sensitivity towards non-traditional female students. Another example took place in 1904 when the faculty moved to excuse female *Special Students* from the weekly three hours of physical exercises which had been a requirement for all "girl students" up till that time (Faculty Minutes, 1896; 1904). Presumably many middle age women were not interested in joining the younger girls on the gymnasium floor! Some modern day institutions still require mothers of grown up children to take a health course which basically consists of sex education and family planning!

The serious intent of the University to accommodate for adult needs was illustrated in president Duniway's address to the faculty in 1912. At this time he announced that students who had finished the eighth grade, in towns which had a high school, could no longer enter the university (preparatory department), but had to attend the high school in their home town. He made it clear, however, that this ruling did not affect adults or "persons of mature years desiring special work." They could still be admitted under previous rules (Faculty Minutes, Sept. 9).

It was not unusual during early pioneering times to hear from older persons who had left high school several years earlier, worked in an office or on a farm, and now wanted to return to school. The following, rather moving letter, clearly illustrates the spirit of the University and its accommodating attitude towards adult learners. This particular letter identifies a problem that many adults are still struggling with today. Dated October 14, 1912 and addressed to President Duniway, the letter reads as follows:

Dear Sir:

I expect to leave here for Laramie the first of September to arrange for a course of study at the State University .... I have just entered my twenty-third year of life. I was taken away from school while in the last grade of grammar school and was forced to help by my earnings, support the family. I was apprenticed to the hosiery business, in which I have worked seven years. Through illness I was forced to give up family, home, and business and move west. You see I have to start all over again as I cannot follow my profession any more. I have always longed for an education along some professional line and the sooner I get started, the better. As I cannot pass the entrance examinations required for admission to the University, would it be possible for a fellow of my age to prepare for it? All I ask is half a chance ....

(Signed) Ferdinand Brown

To this President Duniway replied in the spirit of encouragement and support for which the University was well known (Duniway, 1912).

Dear Sir:

I am very much interested in your letter of August 14th which is just received. The determination to follow out your ambition by coming the the University of Wyoming is in every way commendable .... By all means, come to the University, enter as a *Special Student* without regard to entrance standing and then make your place and your future by industry and good work. Come to see me as soon as you arrive in Laramie and I shall endeavor to fit your need with remunerative employment,

Very truly,

(Signed) The President

The Catalogue of 1891 lists 19 students enrolled in *Special Courses*. The total number of students at the University at that time was 120. This included 61 students in the Academic Program, a consolidated preparatory course for entrance into the freshman class. Excluding

this group, which was not university-level students, the *Special Students,* as a percentage of the total university student body, came to 32. While this number fluctuates during the period under review it appears to be a fair estimate of the proportion of adult students enrolled during the time period under review (Catalogue, 1891; 1913; 1914; 1915; 1918).

Meeting the Needs of Off-Campus Adult Learners

The geographical isolation of large numbers of adults presented a major situational barrier. Roads were almost non existent in the winter and in summer not much more than trails. If people did not live near the railroad it was almost impossible to get to Laramie or the University. Realizing that something needs to be done to reach these isolated learners an Extension Society was formed in 1891 and the public was notified that a list of lectures and unit courses was available from which selections could be made (Johnson & Hebard, 1891). This was the first step towards meeting the needs of those adults who were unable to come to the campus (Constitution and By-Laws, 1891). A number of centers were soon organized and lectures were offered every two weeks. A syllabus was provided for each lecture session. Students who desired, wrote examinations which earned them certificates towards a degree. In reviewing various syllabi, it appears that an extensive amount of work was covered in a single lecture session. Apparently adult learners' need for self-directedness and autonomy was recognized since students were free to do as much work as they were able, or inclined to do. Homework was optional and no discrimination was made between students who did a great deal of work and those who preferred to "audit" classes.

The next step towards making the service to adult students more efficient came in 1893 with the establishment of a correspondence department. According to the Catalogue of 1892 the "scattered population of the state, and the expense of travel rendered the formation of extension centers impossible in many places." Something else had to be done to meet the needs of isolated adult learners. Advertised as "Home Study for All", the University was offering "opportunities for systematic and supervised study to the people of the state at their homes." In varous circulars that were distributedthroughout the state adult learners were promised

that results were excellent "for those who work earnestly" and that practical knowledge and skills could be gained. No formal credentials or preliminary examinations for admission were required. It was also stated that "examinations will not be required except of students who desire certificates or credits" (Circular, 1909). Among the twenty eight courses offered on the first list of correspondence studies were subjects such as geology, physics, psychology, astronomy and botany.

Another group of adults with special learning needs were the teachers of the state. Many of them were unable to come to the campus during the semester. To help meet their needs a highly successful summer school program was introduced in 1904 (Wyoming School Journal, March 1905). The Catalogue (1906-1907) stated its concern with the solution of the "practical problems which confronted the people of this new and undeveloped state."

Starting as a program mainly for school teachers, Summer School rapidly developed into a program which was not only fulfulling in the needs of "inexperienced as well as experienced teachers", but was also providing courses for collegiate students, professional people, miners, ministers, housewives, stenographers, and bookkeepers (President's Report, 1914). By 1914 enrollment came to 209. Twenty one of the 88 students for whom it was possible to ascertain ages, were in their thirties, six were over forty, and the oldest student listed her age as 62. Three of the students were men of the cloth (Record Card File).

This willingness to respond to the specific needs of adult students was evident throughout the period under review. In 1912, for example, an announcement was made to the effect that courses would be arranged to "suit the needs of various classes of students" and that "small and individual needs would be taken in consideration" (Preliminary Announcement, 1912). In the 1914 Catalogue students were informed of the fact that "while certain specific courses were listed, it must not be understood that the opportunities offered would necessarily be limited to the list of studies announced." The University also promised that "in almost all cases, where even a few students desire to pursue a certain line of study, not mentioned in the circular, courses would be arranged to suit their wishes." (Catalogue, 1914). To accommodate

learners who could not attend the full six weeks of Summer School, special short courses of three weeks were introduced in 1918 (Bulletin, 1918).

The same concern and sensitivity to the needs of adults as was evident on campus, in extension classes and in summer school, was demonstrated by the College of Agriculture towards ranchers and farmers. It can be seen in the words of Professor Buffum, Director of the Experiment Station: "an institution with no other interest than the welfare and prosperity of the people for whom it was established and maintained " was committed to bring educational material "to the man at home who is too busy to go to school" (Buffum, 1904).

Understanding of Andragogical Principles

According to evidence the University of early days was well aware of the fact that adults have different orientations towards education and that their needs varied greatly (Circular, 1913). It was possible to identify the three specific types of learners which Cyril Houle classified sixty years later in his seminal study, the Inquiring Mind (1961). A review of courses offered, both on campus and through extension, indicates that provisions were made for goal-oriented individuals who had clear cut objectives to accomplish; activity-oriented persons who enjoyed the circumstances of the learning environment; and the learning-oriented who appeared to be seeking knowledge for its own sake. Commenting on the enrollment in Summer School, President Duniway noted that even though the majority of students at that time were still teachers (goal oriented), an increasing number of students were using the Summer School for "further study along their special lines" (learning oriented) or for "intellectual recreation" (activity oriented). A number of clergymen who were attending regularly did so for "intellectual advancement" (Duniway & Ford, 1914).

The need for continuing education was often emphasized in university publications. In a brief circular, distributed to call attention to an up-coming Summer School in 1913, the rationale for adult education was explained. The goal orientations identified in this circular are still valid today: To attain higher qualifications, a broader outlook, and deeper insight; to keep up with fast changing concepts; to gain new points of views, and new visions; and to get

acquainted with fellow learners. Courses were offered for those "who wish to add to their professional and cultural attainments", learn to appreciate music, wanted to attend "historically scientific lectures of a non-technical nature," or learn how to use a library efficiently (Bulletin, 1918).

Although many years would pass before adult educators such as Malcolm Knowles (1980) would formally identify the crucial assumptions underlaying andragogy the University of Wyoming faculty and administration demonstrated a remarkable understanding of adult learning characteristics. By looking individually at each of the four assumptions that differentiate adults learners from their younger counterparts viz: an increasing self-directed selfconcept, the relationship between readiness to learn and developmental tasks and social roles, the immediacy time perspective, and the role of experience as a resource for learning, it was possible to identify early policies and decisions that clearly illustrate an understanding and a responsiveness to adult student needs.

a. Concept of the Learner:

According to Knowles (1980), the role of a young learner is, by definition, a dependent one. Teachers are expected by society to determine what, when, how and if children should learn. Adult learners generally, however, have a deep psychological need to be self-directed. An illustration of the University's understanding of this concept can be found in the Catalogue of ... which stated that *Special* music students "may enter as at any time ..... and may pursue such work as they may elect" (p. 258). This theme is repeated throughout the period under review, both on campus and off-campus. Adult learners were always reminded that they had a choice and that courses will be offered and conducted in a way that suited their specific needs (Johnson & Hebard, 1891; Circular, 1913; President's Report, 1914). As was mentioned earlier, adult extension learners were free to do as much work as they were able or inclined to do, and no discrimination was made between students who did a great deal of work and those who preferred to "audit" classes.

b. Readiness to Learn:

Traditional age students often learn whenever and whatever society says they ought to learn. Learning is usually organized in a standardized curriculum with a uniform step-by step progression. Adults, on the other hand, seek education opportunities when they experience the need to learn something in order to cope better with real-life tasks or problems. Ideally learning programs should thus be organized around life-application tasks and be offered when students want and need the information (Knowles, 1980).

Illustrating a clear conception of this assumption was the University's willingness to provide courses "best suited to subserve the practical uses of life." If not available, faculty members were instructed to "devise such courses" even though some were "quite outside of the instruction ordinarily furnished" (Board of Trustees, 1889, p. 10). As an example of some of these courses that had been introduced, the Board mentioned a "special course in higher mathematics for the benefit of engineers and surveyors, and courses in phonography." The Summer School of 1908 offered mining and metallurgy courses "along practical lines . . . open to all those who show ability to profit by the instruction given, it was geared towards individual needs . . . with the aims and qualifications of individual students allowed to govern the nature of the instruction" (Catalogue, 1908-1909, p. 190).

c. Orientation to Learning:

Young learners, says Knowles (1980), are usually subject centered in their orientation to learning. They learn because they believe that the information would be useful at a later time. Adults, on the other hand, are performance-centered and are motivated by the desire to achieve increased competence in solving present problems and in handling their day to day tasks.

An example of the University's awareness of this particular need of adults can be found in the Summer School course offerings of 1908. That year's Catalogue announced that commercial and stenographic courses would be offered to create an opportunity for "practical bookkeepers to refresh their knowledge of the work they are doing" and for "stenographers to

improve their speed and efficiency . . . the ultimate aim being to increase their earning capacity" (Catalogue, 1908-1909, p. 193).

d. Role of Experience:

As people grow and develop they accumulate experiences which become an increasingly valuable source for learning, both for themselves and others. The primary techniques for teaching adults, consequently are, experiential techniques -- discussion, problem-solving, simulation exercises and field experiences (Knowles, 1980).

The University's sensitivity to this concept was especially evident in their agricultural extension efforts. The following excerpt form the Wyoming Farm Bulletin of November, 1914 provides a clear illustration:

> We wish the people to understand that these Short Courses and Institutes are for all, and that they should take part in the discussions and demonstrations. We especially invite all to ask questions relative to local problems" (p. 3.).

The following description of the work and the characteristics of a good county agriculturalist is a good illustration of this pioneer institution's amazing understanding of andragogy. It appeared in the Sheridan Post, a local newspaper (1913). It could be a guideline and inspiration for adult educators today.

> We (county agriculturalists) are required to work with farmers -- to study with them rather than to study for them, so we become partners with the farmers to whom we are sent. They give us facts; we give them facts; and then they and we try to find the meaning of the facts as they may apply for good or harm on the farmer's own farm.
>
> The county agriculturalist is a man who must know the farm from the farmer's standpoint, who must know the sciences that serve agriculture, from the standpoint of the scientist, and who must have the gift of gumption that enables a man to translate sound theory into correct practice.

> Having found a man so prepared for service and having the graces of spirit and the graciousness of manner that enables the man of learning to win -- and retain the liking and respect of dogs and children and common men -- then we have a man fit to associate on an equal basis with farmers and others interested in better agriculture and more wholesome life in the country.
>
> He is a man who prefers not to give advice, choosing rather to present the facts that every man may be his own advisor. He prefers not to tell men how to do things, choosing rather to ask questions and to offer hints that will lead every man to discover the how for himself (July 22).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Evidence suggest that a high degree of concern and understanding of adult learner needs existed at the University of Wyoming, more than a century ago. Institutional support and commitment to adult education could be seen in: 1) specific provisions that were made for adults, 2) sensitivity of faculty and administration to adult needs, 3) instructors' understanding of andragogical principles, and 4) efforts made by faculty and administration to overcome informational, situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. This was clearly illustrated in policies regarding: a) exemption from general requirements, b) recognition of experience, c) special interest classes, d) correspondence studies, e) off-campus, and f) summer educational opportunities.

Aware that adults have different orientations towards education and that their needs vary greatly, the University adapted its curriculum accordingly. As was the case with adult students on-campus for whom special provisions were made to fit in with their specific needs and their adult responsibilities, extension education programs were developed to fit in with the daily working lives of adults.

It is hoped that this study will contribute towards the formation of a basis for the conceptual synthesis of the field of adult education and that it will also provide a more accurate

perspective of the roots of post secondary adult education in Wyoming. Further research is needed to determine whether other institutions that existed at that time showed similar concerns for the needs of adult students and what the degree of their responsiveness was.

This study is provocative in the sense that few people realize the degree of institutional responsiveness that existed a 100 years ago. Why have we not made more progress since then?

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